

The 2nd Annual San Francisco Film Noir Festival!

Noir City

CONFIDENTIAL

Jan 25th



VAMPS! VIXENS! VICTIMS!

14 NIGHTS! 28 MOVIES!
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE WOMEN!
CASTRO THEATRE
JANUARY 16-29, 2004



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ANN SAVAGE IN PERSON!
MEANEST WOMAN IN THE MOVIES!



SHE FEVER!



TORRID!

CRAWFORD VS. STANWYCK
"WHO'S THE QUEEN OF NOIR?"

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NOIR CITY 2

The 2nd Annual San Francisco Film Noir Festival
THE CASTRO THEATRE / JANUARY 16 - 29, 2004

Last January, San Francisco officially became the Film Noir capital of the world. The public's overwhelming response to the 1st Annual San Francisco Film Noir Festival was unprecedented. Crowds so huge the Castro opened the balcony! The theatre jammed on a Friday night for *Shakedown* and *The Raging Tide*—virtually unknown movies! Every seat filled for *Woman on the Run* and *Born to Kill*!

I've never been more proud of my hometown.

To satisfy San Francisco's demonstrated craving for classic noir, we've expanded the program for NOIR CITY 2: four more days, eight more films. Last time 'round, by screening twenty films set in San Francisco, we exploded the myth that noir belongs almost exclusively to New York and Los Angeles. This time, we stake another claim: noir is a woman's world, as much as a man's.

When most people think noir, they see Robert Mitchum or Burt Lancaster shunting aside loyal girlfriends to play dirty with dames like Jane Greer or Ava Gardner. Many film scholars would have you believe that crime thrillers of the '40s and '50s relegated women to two basic characters: the femme fatale or Pollyanna. Don't buy it.

The 2004 San Francisco Film Noir Festival is proud to present 28 movies featuring female protagonists just as complex and challenging as their male counterparts. In these stories you'll meet women every bit the equal of men—equally tempted, equally compromised, equally guilty.

As a subplot to the series, we've programmed an array of films starring two formidable actresses who left an indelible impression on murder dramas of this era: Joan Crawford and Barbara Stanwyck. We've double-billed some of their best movies over three nights, and are inviting viewers to cast their votes as to who deserves the title: QUEEN OF NOIR.

My vote goes to someone else entirely. On the strength of a single film, the cult classic *Detour*, Ann Savage secured a special niche in movie history—scariest woman in film noir. We're thrilled that Ms. Savage, going strong at 82 years of age, will join us Opening Night for an on-stage interview following the screening of her 1945 B-movie masterpiece. Many thanks to our friends at the San Francisco Film Society for sponsoring this gala event, and for securing the beautiful print from the Cinémathèque Française in Paris.

In addition to noir touchstones like *Detour*, *Double Indemnity*, *Mildred Pierce*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and *Phantom Lady*, you're also going to encounter incredible 35mm rarities that Castro programmer Anita Monga worked damn hard to get back on the big screen: *Tomorrow is Another Day*, *Desert Fury*, *The Man I Love*, *Caged*, *The Accused*, *The Velvet Touch*, and the utterly indescribable *Decoy*.

Okay, fire up those carbon arc projectors. Let's make it *dark* in here.

— Eddie Muller



Jim Ferreira

Festival founder and host Eddie Muller is the author of *Dark City: The Lost World of Film Noir*; *Dark City Dames: The Wicked Women of Film Noir*; *The Art of Noir: The Posters and Graphics of the Classic Era of Film Noir*. His period crime novel *The Distance* won the Private Eye Writers of America's coveted Shamus Award as Best First Novel of 2002.

He went
searching
for love ...
but Fate
forced a
DETOUR to
Revelry ...
Violence ...
Mystery!



PRC

DETOUR

TOM ANN CLAUDIA
NEAL • SAVAGE • DRAKE

Edmund MacDONALD • Tim RYAN • Esther HOWARD • Roger CLARK
A P. R. C. Production • Associate Producer Martin Mooney
Directed by Edgar G. Ulmer • Screen Play and Original Story Martin Goldsmith

SAN FRANCISCO FILM NOIR FESTIVAL GUEST OF HONOR

Ann Savage

When I sneaked downstairs to watch *Detour* on the Zenith sometime in the mid-1960s, I wondered if my latest foray into clandestine late-night movie viewing would be worth the dual risks of parental wrath and weekend fatigue.

Any misgivings vanished as soon as Ann Savage started spitting vitriol. It's like watching the mythological Circe wielding a switchblade. Like both Ulysses and Tom Neal's doomed *Detour* character, Al Roberts, I was hooked by this femme fatale and couldn't do anything about it.

Detour is a classic example of a "B" programmer in which talent and creativity triumph over a microscopic budget.

While film historians heap deserved praise on director Edgar Ulmer, and notoriety on scandal-plagued Tom Neal (barely acknowledging writer Martin Goldsmith), the enduring reputation of *Detour* is largely due to Ann's riveting performance. In less than 30 minutes of screen time, she stakes her claim in film noir's den of iniquity beside such vixens as Barbara Stanwyck, Ida Lupino, Jane Greer and other dangerous women of the classic era.

Ann Savage's film career proves that Hollywood values luck and timing over skill and integrity. The former Bernice Maxine Lyon appeared in over 30 films, most of them second features. While Ann would be the first to accurately comment that, "'B' doesn't mean bad," one must search diligently for a bookend performance to *Detour*. Some of her notable performances are in films that are nearly impossible to find today: *Dangerous Blondes* (1943), *Midnight Manhunt* (1945), and *The Last Crooked Mile* (1946).



Her way with a wise-crack gives all the spark to *Apology for Murder* (1944), a blatant rip-off of *Double Indemnity*, but she departs way too soon in *The Spider* (1945), opposite noir stalwart Richard Conte. It's fair to say that major studios were clueless on how to leverage Savage's uniqueness into steady box office appeal.

Ann's persona simply defied traditional 1940s PR packaging. She wasn't a stereotypical sexpot, but was too comely for true character roles. Some of her career obstacles were self-imposed. As Eddie Muller revealed in *Dark City Dames*, Ann was light years away from the

typical casting-couch cutie. A true professional who always gave her best while trying to advance her career, Ann would not be bossed around and held to her principles no matter the possible detriment to her career.

"If you cross me, I'm going to tell you exactly how I feel about it," averred Miss Savage. She meant it, whether it was telling a thoughtless production assistant where to go, landing a right cross to the jaw of an obnoxious costar, surviving widowhood amid financial catastrophe, or rebuilding her life and career while becoming an accomplished aviator. Ann's brambly sense of self-respect, and integrity, has given her a full life that still burns brightly.

Ann Savage is much more than the ultimate noir femme fatale—she's a class act all the way.

—Alan K. Rode

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The Line-Up SCHEDULE OF FILMS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16 OPENING NIGHT GALA

Detour 8:00

1945, PRC. 68 min. Dir. Edgar G. Ulmer.
Scr. Martin Goldsmith, from his novel.

Tom Neal, Ann Savage. This tawdry masterpiece is for many the ultimate expression of noir fatalism. On his way to Hollywood, a lovelorn sap picks up the hitch-hiker from Hell. Ann Savage is unforgettable as scheming, consumptive Vera.

**ANN SAVAGE
IN PERSON!!**



SATURDAY, JANUARY 17 CRAWFORD VS. STANWYCK: ROUND ONE

Double Indemnity 1:00, 5:15, 9:40

1944, Paramount. 106 min. Dir. Billy Wilder. Scr. Wilder & Raymond Chandler, from the novel by James M. Cain. Fred MacMurray, Barbara Stanwyck, Edward G. Robinson. The *ne plus ultra* of noir. Wilder's cunning showmanship, and seven Oscar nods, spawned Hollywood's dark renaissance of mordant murder thrillers. It still hasn't been equaled.

Mildred Pierce 7:05, 3:20

1945, Warner Bros. 111 min. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Scr. Ranald McDougall, from the novel by James M. Cain. Joan Crawford, Jack Carson, Zachary Scott, Ann Blyth, Eve Arden, Bruce Bennett. Crawford gives her signature performance (an Oscar winner) as the ultimate maternal martyr, in thrall to her own femme fatale daughter! How noir can you get? A perfect marriage of soap opera and hard-edged pulp.



SUNDAY, JANUARY 18 A GLORIOUS PAIR OF LUPINOS

The Man I Love 1:00, 5:00, 9:10

1946, Warner Bros., 96 min. Dir. Raoul Walsh. Scr. Catherine Turney & Jo Pagano, from the novel *Night Shift* by Maritta Wolff. Ida Lupino, Robert Alda, Andrea King, Bruce Bennett, Martha Vickers. As flinty torch singer Petey Brown, Ida Lupino offers a radiantly romantic vision of the post-WWII American woman—able to settle everybody's hash but her own. As perfect as the Gershwin tune it's named for.

Road House 3:00, 7:00

1948, 20th Century-Fox. 113 min. Dir. Jean Negulesco. Scr. Edward Chodorov, story by Margaret Gruen & Oscar Saul. A star-powered faceoff between two film noir icons: sassy Ida Lupino and psychotic Richard Widmark. Sparks fly when Ida takes a job crooning in Widmark's rural roadhouse, but when she throws him over for his boyhood chum (Cornel Wilde) the joint really starts jumping.





MONDAY, JANUARY 19 LOVE IS A FLAME THAT DESTROYS

The Postman Always Rings Twice

2:50, 7:00

1946, MGM. 113 min. Dir. Tay Garnett. Scr. Harry Ruskin & Niven Busch, from the novel by James M. Cain. Lana Turner, John Garfield. MGM sat on Cain's white hot tale of infidelity and murder for twelve years, before figuring out how to camouflage the story's sordid specifics as a "woman's picture."

Tomorrow Is Another Day **RARITY!**

1:00, 5:05, 9:30

1951, Warner Bros. 90 min. Dir. Felix Feist. Scr. Art Cohn & Guy Endore. Ruth Roman, Steve Cochran. Guaranteed to be the sleeper hit of this year's festival! An ex-con and a dime-a-dance dame flee from a murder and find love on the lam.

Virtually unknown, but packed with revelatory set pieces, this is director Felix Feist's low-rent masterpiece.



TUESDAY, JANUARY 20 CRAWFORD VS. STANWYCK: ROUND TWO

Possessed 7:00

RARITY!

1947, Warner Bros. 108 min. Dir. Curtis Bernhardt. Scr. Sylvia Richards & Ranald MacDougall, from the novel *One Man's Secret*, by Rita Weiman. Joan Crawford, Van Heflin, Raymond Massey, Geraldine Brooks. Unrequited love spurs Joan Crawford to schizophrenia, murder, and another Oscar nomination. One of Joan's most rarely screened noirs.

The Strange Love of Martha Ivers

9:00

1946, Paramount. 115 min. Dir. Lewis Milestone. Scr. Robert Rossen, story by Jack Patrick. Barbara Stanwyck, Van Heflin, Kirk Douglas, Lizabeth Scott. Stanwyck is the cast-iron magnate of an East Coast steel town. When her childhood boyfriend returns home, passions are reignited and buried secrets unearthed. Kirk Douglas' movie debut.



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21 MAUGHAM'S FALLEN WOMEN

The Letter 1:00, 5:00, 9:00

1940, Warner Bros. 95 min. Dir. William Wyler. Scr. Howard Koch, from the story by W. Somerset Maugham. Bette Davis, Herbert Marshall, James Stephenson, Gale Sondergaard. Wife of a Malaysian plantation owner kills her lover in a fit of jealousy, then concocts a seemingly airtight alibi. Fate, and the victim's wife, have other ideas.



Christmas Holiday

3:00, 7:00

RARITY!

1944, Universal, 93 min. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Scr. Herman Mankiewicz, from the novel by W. Somerset Maugham. Deanna Durbin, Gene Kelly, Gale Sondergaard, Dean Harens. A troubled woman spends a stormy night spinning the tale of her tragic marriage to a murderous Mama's boy. Forget *It's a Wonderful Life*—this is our idea of proper Yuletide fare, served up by noir's preeminent director.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22 ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

The Accused 7:00

RARITY!

1949, Paramount. 101 min. Dir. William Dieterle. Scr. Kettie Frings, from the novel *Be Still, My Love*, by June Truesdell. Loretta Young, Robert Cummings, Wendell Corey, Sam Jaffe. A spinsterish college professor rebuffs a student's amorous advances—with a tire iron. Now a murderess, she's suddenly irresistible to men. Is that dogged detective really after the truth—or her?

The Reckless Moment 9:00

1949, Columbia. 82 min. Dir. Max Ophuls. Scr. Mel Dinelli & Robert Kent, from the novel *The Blank Wall* by Elizabeth Sanxay Holding. Joan Bennett, James Mason, Geraldine Brooks. Suburban housewife goes to extraordinary lengths to cover up a murder committed by her daughter. Then roguish blackmailer James Mason enters the picture: sadist or saint? Print courtesy of King World Productions, Inc.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23 TECHNICOLOR NOIR

Leave Her to Heaven 3:00, 7:00

1946, 20th Century Fox, 111 min. Dir. John Stahl. Scr. Jo Swerling, from the novel by Ben Ames Williams. Gene Tierney, Cornell Wilde, Jeanne Crain. Don't let the lush Technicolor gloss fool you — this big-budget melodrama is black at the core, as perverse and malignant as it got in the 1940s. Novelist Wilde falls for gorgeous Tierney, but has no idea what horrors lurk behind those gleaming emerald eyes.

Desert Fury 1:00, 5:00, 9:00

RARITY!

1947, Paramount. 96 min. Dir. Lewis Allen. Scr. A.I. Bezzerides & Robert Rossen. Lizabeth Scott, Burt Lancaster, Mary Astor, John Hodiak, Wendell Corey. We're not sure how to classify this movie, except that it's outrageously gay. Will luscious Liz tear apart the *special* bond shared by gangsters Hodiak and Corey? Is Astor *really* her Mom? Just how clueless is beefcake Burt? Must be seen to be disbelieved.





SATURDAY, JANUARY 24 WOMEN BEHIND BARS

Caged 1:00, 5:30, 10:00

1949, Warner Bros. 96 min. Dir. John Cromwell. Scr. Virginia Kellogg & Bernard Schoenfeld. Sentenced to prison for her role in the failed robbery that killed her husband, a vulnerable innocent undergoes a degrading transformation. Oscar-nominated Eleanor Parker gives the performance of her career, surrounded by a cell block of great character actresses.

I Want to Live 3:00, 7:30

1958, United Artists. 120 min. Dir. Robert Wise. Scr. Nelson Gidding, based on *San Francisco Examiner* articles by Ed Montgomery. Susan Hayward, Simon Oakland, Theodore Bikel. Hayward won an Oscar for her portrayal of Barbara Graham, a party girl accused of murder who proclaimed her innocence all the way to California's gas chamber. Great Fifties jazz score by Johnny Mandel.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25 CRAWFORD VS. STANWYCK: ROUND THREE

Witness to Murder 1:00, 5:10, 9:20

1954, United Artists. 83 min. Dir. Roy Rowland. Scr. Chester Erskine. A distaff *Rear Window*. Career woman Stanwyck witnesses neighbor George Sanders strangle a victim in his swanky digs. It's the word of a single woman against a renowned author (and closet Nazi), so guess whom the LAPD believes? Highlighted by the brilliant camerawork of noir shadowmeister John Alton.

Sudden Fear 3:00, 7:00 **Encore Screening!**

1952, RKO. 110 min. Dir. David Miller. Scr. Lenore Coffee & Robert Smith, from the novel by Edna Sherry. Back by popular demand is another of Joan Crawford's Oscar-nominated noir thrillers. Playwright Joan marries actor she's rejected, doesn't realize he's planning to drop the curtain on her. With Jack Palance and Gloria Grahame. Shot in S.F.

MONDAY, JANUARY 26 WOMEN WITH A SECRET

Crime of Passion 7:00

1957, United Artists, 85 min. Dir. Gerd Oswald. Scr. Jo Eisenger. San Francisco newspaper columnist Barbara Stanwyck falls for virile but passive L.A. cop Sterling Hayden and abandons her career for a life of suburban ennui. She soon puts a homicidal spin on keeping-up-with-the-Joneses, including an affair with noir heavyweight Raymond Burr.

The Velvet Touch 9 00

RARITY!

1948, RKO. 97 min. Dir. John Gage. Scr. Leo Rosten & Walter N. Reilly, story by William Mercer & Annabel Ross. Rosalind Russell takes her only trip into Dark City as a renowned Broadway actress who accidentally kills her producer. Her greatest performance is covering up the crime. Costarring Sydney Greenstreet, Claire Trevor, Leo Genn, and Leon Ames.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27 SERIOUSLY DISTURBED DAMES

The Locket 7 00

1946, RKO. 85 min. Dir. John Brahm. Scr. Sheridan Gibney. Laraine Day, Robert Mitchum, Brian Aherne. A groom hears myriad wedding-day tales of his bride's troubled past. This dazzling—and dizzying—psychological drama uses a web of interlocking flashbacks to show how a woman's childhood obsession for a prized locket dictates the course of her life.

Decoy 9 00

RAREST OF THE RARE!

1946, Monogram. 76 min.

Dir. Jack Bernhard. Scr. Ned Young, story by Stanley Rubin. We proudly present a long-buried B-movie derelict delight! Jean Gillie gives a jaw-dropping performance as the femme fatale leader of a gang that revives a dead man from the gas chamber (!) to lead them to buried loot. Never on television, never released on video, *Decoy* is an absolute must-see!

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28 DAMES WHO CAN DEAL WITH IT

Phantom Lady 1:20, 5:00, 9:00

1944, Universal. 87 min. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Scr. Bernard Schoenfeld, from the novel by Cornell Woolrich. Loyal and lovely Ella Raines is "one hep kitten" as she high-heels her way through the noir *demimonde*, searching for the missing woman who can save her boss from execution. Siodmak wrings every bit of shadowy mystery out of writer Cornell Woolrich's masterpiece of suspense.

Deadline at Dawn 3 10, 7 00

1946, RKO. 73 min. Dir. Harold Clurman. Scr. Clifford Odets, from the novel by Cornell Woolrich. Snarling, sexy Susan Hayward plays a taxi dancer who has until sunrise to help a sad-sack sailor clear himself of an impending murder charge. A classic Cornell Woolrich premise is given a liberal spin by writer Odets and Group Theatre founder Clurman, directing the only film of his career. With Bill Williams, Paul Lukas.



THURSDAY JANUARY 29 A DOUBLE DATE WITH ANN SHERIDAN

The Unfaithful 7 00

1947, Warner Bros. 109 min. Dir. Vincent Sherman. Scr. David Goodis & James Gunn. Ann Sheridan plays a woman whose sexual indiscretion leads to murder and a tangled web of deceit. Isn't that always the way? Noir scribe Goodis applies his typically thorny plotting to this reimagining of *The Letter*, transposed to late 40's Los Angeles. With Lew Ayres, Zachary Scott, and Eve Arden.

Woman on the Run 9 15

Encore Screening!

1950, Fidelity Classics. 77 min. Dir. Norman Foster. Scr. Alan Campbell & Norman Foster, from a story by Sylvia Tate. Ann Sheridan returns, closing out the festival with a reprise of our most popular film from last year! A poignant love story unfolds as an embittered wife reluctantly searches for her missing husband, the target of a murderer. Another chance to catch this long-lost classic, shot on location in S.F. Costarring the underrated Dennis O'Keefe.



CAST YOUR VOTE!

**You've seen their films!
You're felt their fury!**

**But only one can
wear the crown of ...**


Queen of Noir

**Clip your choice and drop her
in the ballot box in the lobby!
Results revealed on the last day
of the festival!**



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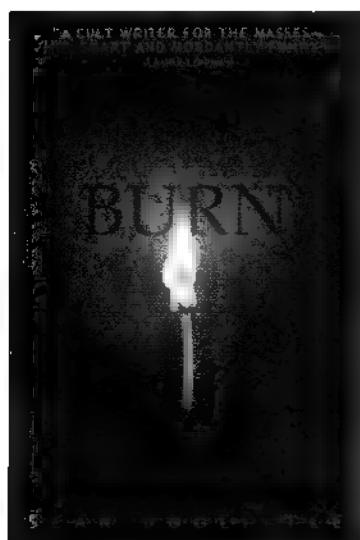


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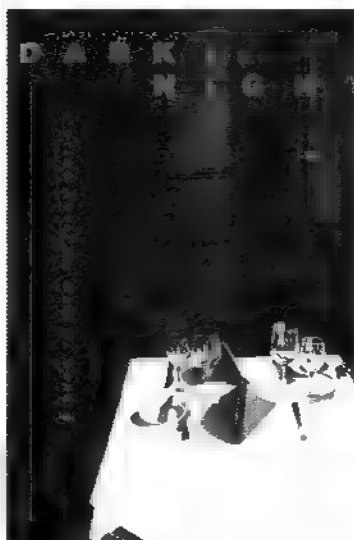
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WOMAN ON THE RUN

NOTES ON A PHANTOM FILM

PHILIPPE GARNIER

When *Woman on the Run* was released in October 1950, some critics wondered about the title. The story concerned a husband on the lam because he witnessed a mob killing—and his estranged wife, who after a few indifferent shrugs traipses all over San Francisco looking for him. She, in turn, is shadowed by both the killer and the police. The original story, as well as the working title of the picture, had in fact been *Man on the Run*, and the sex change only occurred in June 1950, when Fidelity Pictures handed over the finished product to Universal. Damned if the studio publicity department was going to feature a guy on the poster, when they had Ann Sheridan and a rollercoaster to promote.

The man behind Fidelity was Howard Welsch, who in association with financier A. Pam Blumenthal would go on to produce two films by Fritz Lang (*Rancho Notorious* shares many key crew members with *Woman on the Run*, including composer Emil Newman, cameraman Hal Mohr and editor Otto Ludwig), as well as a few intriguing titles such as *The San Francisco Story* (a little-scen crime picture with Joel McCrae, Yvonne DeCarlo and Richard Erdman), *Montana Belle* for Republic, *A Bullet Is Waiting* for RKO, as well as a Nick Ray gypsy quickie for Columbia, *Hot Blood*.

Welsch came from the lower rungs of producing, having started in 1936 with *Trouble Ahead*, a Charlie Farrell B-movie he made for short-lived Times Films. He'd also done cheap westerns and Arthur Lubin comedies for Universal, as well as a series of Philo Vance for Eagle-Lion and PRC.

In January 1949, when he hung his Fidelity shingle at the old Motion Picture Center on Cahuenga

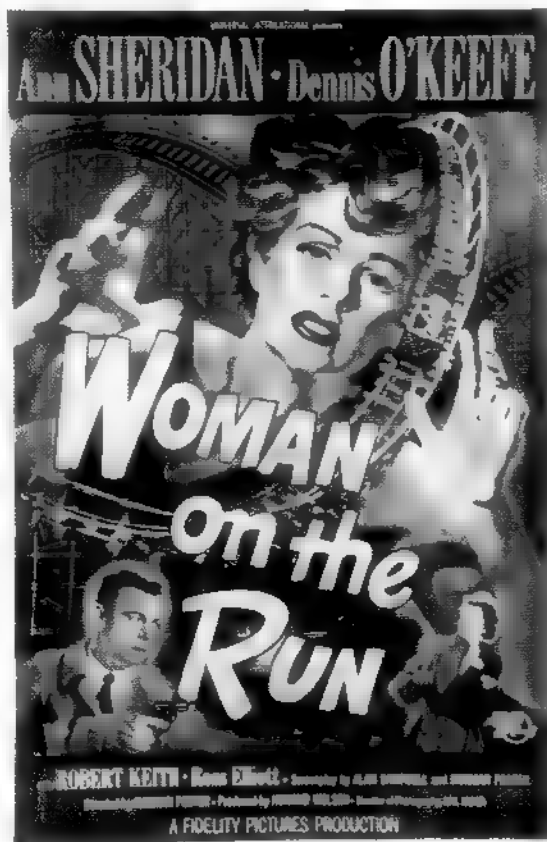
Boulevard, he already had bought a short story by Sylvia Tate published the year before in *American* magazine. Tate was a commercial writer, at home with the slicks and women's magazines. Her breakthrough was a swing band novel published in 1947 by Harpers, *Never By Chance*, which had the peculiarity of being written mostly in dialogues.

Her story *Man on the Run* was set in New Orleans, not San Francisco. The husband was a failed artist working as a window dresser, like in the movie, but at the Maison Blanche department store. His sour marriage was established before he witnessed the killing that scares him off and turns him into a fugitive from both the law and the mob. Tate's story features a mobster named Caldera, two of his henchmen, and no reporter whatsoever. It is her policeman, Detective Mark Ferris, who falls for Eleanor, the wife.

As in the movie, she does not have a picture of her husband around the flat or in her purse, and unbeknownst to her is his need of medication for a heart condition. The cop is convinced that she will lead him to her husband if he follows her. The two henchmen try to kidnap her, but the cops arrive

in time. Now the wife is determined to find her husband before they kill him. He must be in the Jackson Square section of town, a bohemian neighborhood the artist favors. She finds him but they are followed, they take refuge inside the cold room of a café, and Frank, the husband, takes care of the mobsters. As the forlorn cop looks on, Eleanor rushes into her husband's arms. "Frank doesn't have heart troubles anymore!"

As adapted for the screen, *Woman on the Run* is a model of a compact story, well-told in 75 minutes.



Besides the cracking good dialogue, there is much grim humor. And substituting the double-crossing reporter played by Dennis O'Keefe for both the mobster and his two men is just one example of its economy: not only does it compress three characters into one, but instead of having the vague and conventional threat of pursuers, we get O'Keefe really interacting with Sheridan, winning her confidence and maybe more. His offer of \$5,000 for her husband's story sets up the great finale on an amusement park rollercoaster. As in Max Ophuls' *The Reckless Moment*, the villain weakens near the end, having fallen for his victim—but this time around, not quite.

This marvelous script is credited to Dorothy Parker's husband, Alan Campbell, and to Norman Foster, the director. But in 1953, a \$75,000 plagiarism suit was brought by two writing partners, Manuel Seff and Paul Yawitz, against Fidelity Pictures' two principals, as well as Universal-International. It was settled for an undisclosed sum. Only the Universal publicity files appear to exist for the film, and barring discovery of the Fidelity production files, it is impossible to determine who wrote what.

Whoever is responsible, it is an unusually well written script for a film of this type. There are no clichés, no femme fatale, no sinister mobster (the villain is craftily shown in sheep's clothing, and the Big Guy is heard of but not seen). And we discover

why Sheridan's marriage is a failure at the same time as she does, involving us all the more.

Ann Sheridan liked her part so much she personally wrote a letter to Al Horwitz, head of the Universal publicity unit, to offer her services for promotion. She even went on the road for it, something she hadn't done since her early days at Warners. "I sincerely feel," she wrote, "it is one of the most exciting things I've ever worked in."

She made personal appearances in New York, Boston, Cleveland and Chicago. It was her third film after she bought out the remainder of her contract with Warners. After a ten-month shoot with Howard Hawks on *I Was a Male War Bride*, fraught with illnesses and bad weather, she was seeking a dramatic role to put her freelance career on a different path.

In 1950, Sheridan certainly wasn't the Oomph Girl anymore, the one-of-the-guys gal who once was offered a truck by a bunch of randy Teamsters as a promotional stunt for *They Drive by Night*. Here her looks are as threadbare as the dingy flat she lives in, and her wardrobe cost the production a mere hundred bucks. Any of her Warner Bros. pictures averaged \$40,000 in wardrobe costs alone.

Sheridan was also perfect to deliver the acid dialogue (which prompted one critic to qualify the picture as "a probing study of a modern marriage"). Robert Keith, who plays the now sexless but stoic



Welcome to the 2nd Annual Noir City Film Festival

Who's the man at the left and what is his connection to the festival?

Bring your answer to the table in the lobby for a chance to win a VHS copy of the 1946 Monogram noir, "Decoy." Shown at the festival and once thought to be lost on tape.

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policeman, is more on the ball when he mumbles, after listening to Sheridan grouse about her husband, "No wonder the world is filled with bachelors."

The tone of the film, with its failed couple and disenchanted patter, could have come straight from David Goodis' early novels, when he was still writing for the women's market. His jaundiced view of marriage in *Behold This Woman* comes very close to the one shown in this picture, or in *The Unfaithful*, the post-war film he had co-written for Jerry Wald at Warners three years before *Woman on the Run*. Except that the latter is not so crassly misogynist. Everyone is to blame, and everyone has an excuse.

Ex-actor Norman Foster had two Orson Welles collaborations under his belt at this point, but this is certainly his best, nerviest directing effort. Not only does he benefit from three weeks of location shooting on Nob Hill, in Chinatown, Golden Gate Park and the Embarcadero (the studio even put out a promotional map-blitter for the film, reminiscent of the Dell



mystery map-back covers), but Foster also peppers his film with character actors of another age, including John Ford lifers like John Qualen and J. Farrell MacDonald; Steven Geray as a doctor, and the wonderful, beefy Joe Gordon is the saloon keeper, Dillon.

Besides promotion, Sheridan was also involved in the casting, talking the producer into hiring Reiko

Sato, whom she had seen and heard while dining at the notorious Forbidden City restaurant in Chinatown. The nightclub singer in the script was changed into an exotic dancer, the club into a Chinese establishment. That gave Foster the opportunity to hire local actor Victor Sen Yung, whom he had directed in countless Mister Moto and Charlie Chan pictures early in his career.

After three weeks in San Francisco, the company moved to Los Angeles for more location shooting, principally on the run-down streets of Bunker Hill. The rousing rollercoaster finale was shot at Ocean Park pier over seven nights a big lighting job

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requiring 206 huge lamps. (The filmmakers made sure to insert a shot of Laughing Sal, mechanical puppet at the old S.F. Playland, now exhibited at Pier 31.)

Sheridan bravely rode the rollercoaster eleven times before turning chartreuse; the stuntwoman replacing her also had to be replaced, same reason. For the climactic fight between O'Keefe and Ross Elliott (a newcomer playing the husband on the run), a scaled-down replica of the rollercoaster was built, capable of rolling down a 40-foot ramp to whiz past the actors' heads. Instead, the car jumped the track and slammed into the actors. O'Keefe was thrown 20 feet, the gash on Elliott's hand required six stitches. To add insult to injury, O'Keefe was bitten by the dog!

If Sheridan's star was on the wane at this time, Robert Keith's was on the rise, ever since his success in *Mr. Roberts* on Broadway. The same year he was also seen in *Edge of Doom* at Goldwyn, and Henry Hathaway's *14 Hours*, as well as Alan Ladd's Paramount western, *Branded*. So much in the news was Keith that Universal tried to work out a mutual publicity campaign with Goldwyn, whose *Edge of Doom* was coming out the same time as *Woman on the Run*.

Yet, despite a real push from Universal and good notices ("A good chase meller, a notch above par for this type," garbled the *Daily Mirror*; "Exciting film" stated the *Hollywood Reporter*), *Woman on the Run* failed to rouse enthusiasm at the box office. Given the exceptional, if modest, qualities of the picture, it is dispiriting to learn that it grossed less, in comparable release, than other titles in its league: *Shakedown*, *Borderline*, *Cry Danger*, even the obscure *I Was a Shoplifter*—all had bigger returns in their first week than the paltry \$13,062 earned by *Woman on the Run*.

The picture was released in Europe that same year but failed to make an impression, its shadowy presence summed up by the French title, *Dans l'Ombre de San Francisco*. And for contractual reasons, this little gem disappeared from movieland altogether, not playing in cinematheques, revivals, or even much on television. Neither its actors, director, producer or writers had names to excite the curiosity of even the most rabid auteurist which in itself is enough to lay bare the limits of that famous theory.

As it is, nobody knows for sure who owns the rights to the picture, much less Universal, whose vault master, Paul Ginsburg, had almost to be hypnotized to let tenacious Anita Monga, programmer at the Castro Theatre, screen its sole print for last year's inaugural San Francisco Film Noir Festival.

Miraculously, *Woman on the Run* is now back in circulation on the revival house circuit, in its original 35mm glory, after vanishing for more than fifty years. It is a rare film that, for once, truly is worthy of being rediscovered.

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EDDIE MULLER

NO TWO WOMEN ARE MORE EMBLEMATIC OF FILM NOIR'S FEMININE SIDE THAN JOAN CRAWFORD AND BARBARA STANWYCK. THEIR STRANGE LIVES, REMARKABLY SIMILAR AT TIMES, HELPED THEM CREATE UNFORGETTABLE SCREEN PERSONAS.

Joan Crawford was a classic rags-to-riches story as written by James M. Cain. Born dirt poor in San Antonio, Lucille Fay LeSueur was abandoned by her father in childhood. She changed her name to Billie Cassin after moving to Kansas City with her remarried mother.

After toiling as a phone operator, launderer and waitress, she won a Charleston contest that earned her a spot in a Missouri chorus line. She danced her way to New York stages, then to Hollywood, parlaying her big eyes and shapely legs into a series of "flapper" roles in silent pictures.

Lucille was ruthless in her quest for the brass ring. She trained diligently to improve her body, mind, acting, and *savoir faire*. A nationwide publicity campaign staged by Louis B. Mayer changed her name to Joan Crawford, signifying MGM's commitment to her career. She was, almost literally, reborn.

Columnist Louella Parsons said "She is the only star I know who manufactured herself... She drew up a blueprint for herself and outlined a beautiful package of skin, bones and character and then set out to put life into the outline. She succeeded, and so Joan Crawford came into existence at the same time an overweight Charleston dancer, born Lucille LeSueur, disappeared from the world." If this sounds suspiciously like the plot of a film noir, wait—it gets thicker.

Crawford's ascension from chippie to princess

culminated in marriage to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., scion of the most famous and wealthy acting family on earth. Joan's mother-in-law, Mary Pickford, was the biggest star of the silent era. (Joan never spoke of her marriage to New York sax player James Welton, whom

she left when Hollywood called.)

Soon Crawford was coronated herself, able to pick plum leading roles and leave that cheap party girl Lucille behind forever. Joan's wide-shouldered costumes, tailored exclusively by Gilbert Adrian, started fashion trends; she demanded approval of her close-ups; she refused to work during her period, claiming she didn't photograph as well. She controlled her career, and stood up to the biggest shots with a tough-talking demeanor Mildred Pierce would have envied.

Her ballbreaking bluntness proved a rough go for her husbands, as Crawford blurred the line between home and career. She required her husbands to

walk two steps behind her in public, and in private she often made them submit to her on their knees. Once she gained entrée to the Dream Factory firmament, she dropped Fairbanks. She had affairs with many of her leading men, most famously Clark Gable, but she picked stage actor Franchot Tone as Husband #3. Then one day she caught him in his dressing room, rehearsing a young extra. She demanded to know how long he'd been cheating. "It happens every day," he replied. "I have to prove to myself that I am still a man, before I go home to you."



Husband #4, Phil Terry, was functional. "I knew what kind of marriage it was going to be when she walked on the set," recalled John Wayne. "First came Joan, then her secretary, then her makeup man, then her wardrobe woman, then finally Phil Terry, carrying the dog."

Crawford had had an abortion in the late 1920s, so as not to derail her accelerating career. Once she wanted children, things got difficult: seven miscarriages while married to Tone. By 1939 she had abandoned hope of conceiving. One adoption attempt was pure noir: she secretly ordered a newborn from a Tennessee "baby mill," but when the child's mother learned who had adopted the baby, she showed up at Crawford's house, angling for more money. Never one to be intimidated, Joan simply gave the baby back.

She eventually adopted a girl, who endured infancy as Joan Crawford, Jr., before Mother gave her a break and renamed her Christina. Last break the kid got. The maternal Joan Crawford careered out of *Dark City* into horror film terrain. She'd beat Christina and her three other adopted children, lock them in closets, publicly humiliate them, lash them to their beds all night—a form of psychotic motherly domination to challenge the world's finest headshrinkers. Years on, Christina would exact her revenge, penning the poison memoir *Mommie Dearest*.

When *Mildred Pierce* came along in 1945, Crawford was on the skids. MGM had soured on her, convinced that her big, brassy style was tarnished by encroaching "middle age" (she was in her early forties). She needed a hit. Badly.

Moving to Warner Bros., she forsook the glamour roles, and went for a tougher, more self-revelatory persona. Despite the airs she affected, Crawford had a gutter mouth and always toted a short dog of Canadian Club in her velvet clutch. Noir was the perfect fit for her; it let Lucille LeSueur resurface.

"From *Mildred Pierce* onward, a show of innocence was impossible," wrote her biographer, Bob Thomas. "Her portrayals could no longer be complementary to men, they were competitive with men. She sought to destroy them, not to entice them."

In *Possessed* (1947) she destroys Van Heflin, even though he's the love of her life. It's a classic example of a "women's picture" tinted noir by the application of murder and madness. It also marked the first time Joan's huge eyes displayed more craziness than sexiness. Her career had passed a point of no return. The oddly masculine energy that lurked beneath those fine cheekbones came pouring out.

Between 1948 and 1954, Joan Crawford acted as the behind-the-scenes producer of a series of spiteful melodramas which, taken as a whole, suggest she was a genuine noir auteur. *Viragos in Love* could be the overall title for the series.

Some of these movies are bona fide crime thrillers, like *Flamingo Road*, *The Damned* *Don't Cry*, and the loopy *This Woman is Dangerous*. Other are malignant domestic melodramas: *Harriet Craig*, *Female on the Beach*, *Autumn Leaves*, and the Joanest of all, *Queen Bee*. In each one, Crawford displays, grotesquely at times, the essential motivation in all classic noir: desperation. Not in the character, mind you, but in *her-self*. Here was a woman heedlessly determined to maintain her image, her status, her sex appeal, and her

power over men.

Crawford rejected the notion of "range," creating instead minute variations in her tightly fitted mask. She needed, and demanded, that audiences not only relish her animus, but *love* her, as well. So it was that, in one film after another, she was a defiant, independent woman who, in the closing reel, reverts to a sweet faux-naïf, desiring only to be kept by the man who tamed her.



"In one of the most successful charades in American movies," wrote film historian Foster Hirsch, "Crawford disguised her own toughness with a veneer of upbeat sentiment that convinced her fans that, at heart, beneath the increasingly taut face, she was just like them."

Joan's big-screen luster dimmed briefly in the late 1940s. But in 1952, noir rescued her again. In *Sudden Fear* she's a successful San Francisco playwright who marries an actor she'd rejected for one of her plays. This being noir, the groom's got a greedy little gal on the side, and together they script a final curtain for the playwright. *Sudden Fear* was a big hit, earning Crawford her third noir-etched Oscar nomination.

It was Joan's last hurrah. She clung tenaciously to her imperiousness, but producers, trying to fend off the challenge of television, looked elsewhere for box-office allure. When the big contracts dried up, she married husband #5, Alfred Steele, an executive with Pepsi-Cola. Joan became a board director and touring ambassador for the soft-drink company, and she and Al lived the high life on Pepsi's tab for four years. When he died suddenly of a heart attack in 1959, it was a one-two punch for Joan: after debts and taxes

were tallied, Steele had died flat broke.

Joan went back to work, but now, in true middle age, the parts offered only parodied her former image. She and Bette Davis picked themselves to pieces in Robert Aldrich's horrific black comedy *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* By the 1960s, Crawford was a monstrous joke, bulging her famous eyes in horror shows such as *Strait-Jacket*, *Berserk*, and *I Saw What You Did*. She was treading whiskey by the time she did her last picture, *Trog*, in 1970.

After that, most of her public appearances were boozy, bleary, and embarrassing. Pepsi distanced itself from its most famous stockholder. A serious fall almost killed her, and scared her into drying out. Unfortunately, her withdrawal induced paranoia. She spent her last years a virtual prisoner in her apartment, afraid to venture out for fear she'd be murdered.

By May, 1977, she'd withered to a shell of her once vital self, bedridden, attended by two nurses. But she had one great Joan Crawford moment left. When she overheard one of the nurses praying for her soul in her final moments, she raised her head and seethed: "Damn it—don't you dare ask God to help me!"

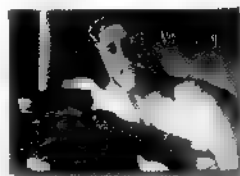
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One balmy evening in the mid-1930s you'd have sworn Bristol Avenue, a tony boulevard in the exclusive L.A. enclave of Brentwood, was the heart of noir. It was the night Joan Crawford's neighbor, Barbara Stanwyck, scrambled over the wall separating their palatial homes, fleeing the punches of her drunk husband, Frank Fay. Crawford knew where Stanwyck was coming from. She often used a thick base to hide the bruises doled out by her own tanked-up spouse, Franchot Tone. For both men, the booze was just a lubricant—envy of their wives' broader power and renown is what fueled their violent rage.

Lousy husbands weren't all the two stars had in common. Both had been chorines in New York. Both survived bleak, impoverished childhoods. Both ranked career over marriage, and played second fiddle to no man. Neither could bear children. Both chose to adopt; both proved to be atrocious mothers. Between them, they left an indelible impression—a new cinematic image of iron-willed, independent women.

Barbara Stanwyck's memorable turn as the scheming temptress in *Double Indemnity* was only her initial contribution to a legacy of "murder dramas." During noir's heyday, Stanwyck reeled out an array of ferocious females, both "good" and "evil," slugging their way through the riskiest neighborhoods of Dark City, and the existential void beyond. Real life offered Stanwyck plenty of experience to draw from.

Born Ruby Stevens in Brooklyn, 1907, youngest of five kids, she was three when her mother, stepping from a streetcar, was killed by a drunk driver. Her devastated Dad abandoned the children and fled to Panama, finding work as a ditch digger. Whenever Ruby ran away from foster homes, her siblings would always find her in the same place: on the stoop of the old house on Classon Avenue, waiting for Mom's return.

At fourteen Ruby was on her own, supporting herself with menial jobs and foregoing a formal education. She had no illusions about the world and her place in it. She was wounded and angry, and talented and disciplined. The perfect soldier.

By sixteen she found a home in The Deuce, hoofing in the chorus of the Strand Roof nightclub, her first of many shake-and-shimmy venues. Working the roaring all-night shift, she no doubt rubbed shoulders with fellow jazz baby Lucille LeSueur in one glittery speakeasy or another. She was tight with Oscar Levant, piano-playing Pied Piper of Manhattan's smart set.

Broadway impresario Willard Mack gave Ruby her big boost to the legit stage, with a showcase role in his production of *The Noose*, starring Rex Cherryman. He also changed her name to Barbara Stanwyck. "Ruby Stevens sounds like a stripper," Mack said.

Wise to the ramble, but still unschooled in affairs of the heart, Stanwyck, all of 19, fell in love with the rakish Cherryman. Simultaneously, their careers got legs: Stage and film offers poured in. They talked of marriage, once things settled down.

Suffering from exhaustion, Cherryman was advised by doctors to book a restorative voyage to Europe. Barbara bid him adieu on the New York wharves, pledging her love. Cherryman didn't need the round-trip ticket. He died aboard ship, from septic poisoning.

The lonely orphan learned a lesson. From then on she would be invulnerable.

Levant introduced Stanwyck to vaudeville superstar Frank Fay, New York's King of Comedy. His Irish bluster and roguish arrogance were a wedge that split open the Big Apple for her. Stanwyck would later say Fay was like the father she never had. Only one month after Cherryman's ill-fated cruise, Stanwyck and Fay were married. Louis B. Mayer, in town to find performers who had voices he could exploit in those newfangled talkies, provided the next plot twist: after seeing, and hearing, Stanwyck in the stage show *Burlesque*, he offered her a screen test.

The fortunes of Frank Fay and Barbara Stanwyck quickly progressed in opposite directions. Once in Hollywood, Stanwyck rose to prominence, while Fay's pug-nacious brand of tomfoolery fizzled. Their rocky relationship served as the inspiration for *A Star Is Born*.

Stanwyck was always different. She projected a steely self-reliance that had as much to do with her ingrained identity as with acting ability. Without formal training, Barbara Stanwyck quickly became the most reliable, protean actress in the business. She appeared in a number of challenging films by Frank

Capra and William Wellman, waded to an Oscar nomination in the tear-drenched soap opera *Stella Dallas* (1937), and was a smashing comedienne in two classics, *Ball of Fire* (1941), in which she played slang-spewing Sugarpuss O'Shea, and *The Lady Eve* (1941).

Although she could deliver vulnerable maidens as convincingly as any doe-eyed ingenue, Stanwyck had spine to spare in her personal life. In 1933 she founded the Athena National Sorority, an organization dedicated to advancing the careers of young businesswomen. Stanwyck was a good role model, since she acted as her own boss. She eschewed long-term studio contracts, opting astutely to pursue, as a freelancer, the juiciest roles. Her on-screen naturalism appealed to

both men and women, and distinguished her from more mannered contemporaries. What stood out most strongly from her screen image was toughness. Even playing a victim, she'd never quit without a fight.

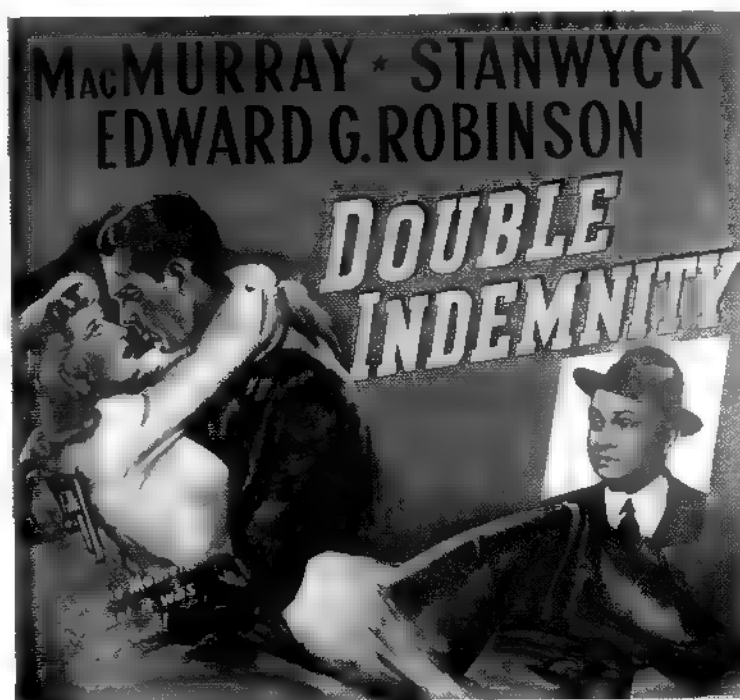
Stanwyck feared that her first descent into Dark City, *Double Indemnity*, was going to cold-cock her career by pushing her hardness to the extreme—merciless murderess. To her surprise, audiences relished her cru-

elty. Her character, Phyllis Dietrichson, became legend. In 1944, the Internal Revenue Service revealed that the former dime-a-dance dame was the highest paid woman in the United States, outworking and out-earning her nearest rival, Bette Davis.

After some lightweight wartime fodder, Stanwyck started parking regularly on the shady side of Hate Street, starting with perhaps the meanest murder drama ever, *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946).

Written by Robert Rossen, *Martha Ivers* is a delirious "women's picture," in which the fear and guilt of youth plague the protagonists through their adult lives.

While this grim fairy tale was concocted on Paramount's painted sets, real-life dramas flared outside the lot. A power struggle between rival labor unions—



entrenched, graft-stained IATSE and the fledgling, Red-hued Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) erupted in chain-swinging melees. Studio heads, caught in the middle, called in the cops, and mob-sponsored goon squads, to break things up. This street warfare was ground zero in the coming anti-Communist frenzy.

Stanwyck had no qualms about crossing picket lines. She disdained the political battle raging around her, choosing to trample anyone who tried to cheat her out of work. She traded political and religious beliefs for career compulsion. It was as if she'd evaporate if she couldn't recreate herself with each new role, disguising her intense insecurity in a parade of commanding characters. As the witchhunt burned through Hollywood, Stanwyck swung far to the right, aligning herself with those who'd safeguard her career.

The "real" Stanwyck was a legendary cipher. She was obsessively private and had a very small circle of friends. Her second marriage, to actor Robert Taylor, was a studio-arranged union many people suspected was "lavender," intended to camouflage both partners' rumored homosexuality. Although Taylor's later affairs with Ava Gardner and other ingenues proved him at least bisexual, Stanwyck remained loyal to him, steadfastly propping up the facade of "the perfect Hollywood marriage."

Throughout the twelve-year union with Taylor, which ended in divorce in 1951, Stanwyck was actually closer to her veteran publicist, Helen Ferguson. Their personal and professional bond spawned decades of rumors that Stanwyck was Hollywood's most famous closeted lesbian.

While the innuendo swirled, Stanwyck marched on. She forced herself to be a trooper, submerging her loneliness in a torrent of work, much of it in dark crime dramas later christened film noir.

In *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948) she was wealthy invalid Leona Stevenson, who through crossed telephone wires overhears the planning of a woman's murder. Confined to her bed, Leona is terrorized when she realizes she is the intended victim. Scenarist Lucille Fletcher fleshed out her famous 22-minute radio play, infusing it with a theme endemic to many noirs of the period—the resentful underclass scheming to undermine the rich. In this case the culprit is her dimwit husband (Burt Lancaster), rebelling against his wife's mental and monetary domination.

The File on Thelma Jordan (1950), placed Stanwyck back in Cain territory. She lures gullible district attorney Cleve Marshall (Wendell Corey) into an affair, so she can use him in a plot to rob and murder her rich aunt. Although her sleazeball lover, Tony Laredo (Richard Romer), actually hatches the crime, Thelma's arrested and tried. Hopelessly in love with her, Cleve intentionally loses the case, expecting to win Thelma's devotion. When the acquitted Thelma dumps him to run away with Tony, tragedy ensues.

No Man of Her Own (1950), may be the ultimate "women's noir." Director Mitchell Leisen, the wizard of "weepies," directed this

smooth adaptation of Cornell Woolrich's novel *I Married A Dead Man*, fashioning a combination of tear-jerker and back-stabber.

Clash by Night (1952), based on Clifford Odets's play, was, like most of his work, a verbose variety of noir. Mae Doyle (Stanwyck) returns to her hometown and takes a shot at complacency by marrying a sweet, simple fisherman (Paul Douglas). But she ruins herself by having an affair with her husband's scary pal, Earl (Robert Ryan). After the tenth self-revelatory Odets monologue, you're itching for somebody to grab a gat and start blasting.

Jeopardy (1952) featured the queasy spectacle of



Stanwyck letting herself be raped by escaped con Ralph Meeker, in exchange for his helping save her drowning husband (Barry Sullivan). *Witness to Murder* (1954) was more complex—a distaff *Rear Window*, it beat Hitchcock's gem into theaters, but lacked its brilliantly polished angles. Although she'd no doubt deride such a pronouncement, Stanwyck, merely by being Stanwyck, had by the mid-1950s created a substantial proto-feminist body of work.

Her last true noir was *Crime of Passion* (1957). A feisty San Francisco newspaper advice columnist, Kathy Ferguson (!), shows up a pair of out-of-town cops by using her column to reel in the fugitive they're pursuing. Lt. Bill Doyle (Sterling Hayden) falls for her, and they get hitched. Kathy abandons her career and moves to the drowsy suburbs of Los Angeles. The thrill of the newsroom is replaced by endless parties where the men talk pensions and the wives blather on about clothes and canapés. This mundane existence induces psychosis: Kathy foists her thwarted ambition onto her passive husband, trying to win him the promotion that will hoist them above their detested peers.

Unfortunately, this scheme involves sex with Tony Pope, chief of Homicide (Raymond Burr). When Pope balks at making Bill his successor, Kathy swipes a gun from the evidence room and gives Pope six good reasons to have promoted her husband.

The script isn't bold enough to portray Kathy as much more than a sociopathic harpy, but it clearly suggests she was better off a career woman than as an unhappy homemaker. Stanwyck's transformation from tart-tongued, streetwise reporter to a human lapdog was a none-too-subtle Eisenhower-era condemnation of women's subordination, dressed as a conventional murder drama.

Stanwyck's days of big screen glory were numbered. She was magnificent in Samuel Fuller's loaded-for-bear western, *Forty Guns*—perhaps the most feminist film ever made in Hollywood. And in the outrageous *Walk On the Wild Side*, she was as close to a lesbian dominatrix as you'd see on screen in 1962. Her biggest success came, however, on the small screen, as Victoria Barkley in *The Big Valley*, a role, and show, conceived expressly for her by screenwriter A.I. Bezzerides (*Thieves' Highway*, *Kiss Me Deadly*).

Unlike Crawford, her comrade in noir, Stanwyck went out with regal bearing intact.

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